

ERIE-NIAGARA REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP
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Tod A. Kniazuk

Memorandum

To: Co-Chairs Clyde Burmaster & Barry Weinstein, MD

From: Economic Development Subcommittee Chair Hector Titus

Re: October & November small business committee meetings

Date: December 3, 2004

The Erie-Niagara Regional Partnership small business assistance steering committee met October 6, and November 17, 2004 in Hayes Hall at the University at Buffalo South Campus. (Full minutes of each meeting can be found below.)

Following a solicitation for proposals (SFP) process to design and construct the project's website for which we received nine replies, the steering committee reviewed five qualifying proposals: CompSys Technologies, Conbrio, Graphicon Services, The PCA Group, and Web Media Services. The steering committee subsequently interviewed Conbrio, Graphicon, and Web Media. The steering committee then deliberated and issued a recommendation for ENRP's consideration.

The Erie-Niagara Regional Partnership Economic Development Subcommittee requests that, pursuant to the unanimous recommendation of the small business steering committee, ENRP award a contract to Conbrio in an amount not to exceed \$10,000 for the design and construction of a small business assistance website. (Conbrio's proposal was e-mailed to ENRP members on November 17, and is attached to this report.)

Small Business Steering Committee Meeting No. 3 October 6, 2004

Present: Thomas Burke, Donald Butzek, Michael Casale,
Ann Enger, Reggie Grogan, Les Hoffman,
Loretta Kaminsky, Paul Parise, Melinda Rath Sanderson,
Paul Westfall

Erie-Niagara Regional Partnership (ENRP) Administrator Tod A. Kniazuk welcomed the steering committee. The members introduced themselves. Kniazuk explained that Economic Development Chair Hector Titus had an unexpected conflict, and apologized for missing the meeting.

Kniazuk reported that ENRP adopted the steering committee's recommendation to issue a solicitation for proposals (SFP) to design and construct the project's website, and that the process has begun.

Darren Kempner of the UB Institute for Local Governance and Regional Growth (who is working with ENRP on the project), reported that SFPs were sent to 41 businesses and posted on two websites. To date, we have received nine inquiries for more information.

Kniazuk detailed the remainder of the process:

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| October 20: | SFP responses due |
| October 20-25: | Staff review based on required elements (cost, technology, data collection) |
| October 25: | Qualified responses to steering committee for ranking of top three |
| November 10: | Rankings due, tabulated |
| November 17: | Steering committee interviews top three; deliberation; recommendation to ENRP |
| November 17: | ENRP receives recommended proposal |
| December 3: | ENRP vote to award contract |

Kniazuk then detailed the other elements that would need to be worked on concurrently with the building of the site. They are a) writing and collection of the helpful documents, glossary, and frequently asked questions pages; b) an outreach plan to educate and involve the other agencies; and c) a marketing plan to make the public aware of the site. Volunteers will be needed from the steering committee to spearhead each of these efforts.

Suggestions from the steering committee included keeping the site user friendly, enabling users to easily print hard copies of their search results and other pages, and making our data available to the agencies. It was also suggested that we continue to look for similar sites for possible direction (although research to date shows that we are fairly unique in our effort).

The next meeting was scheduled for Wednesday, November 17 at 8:30 a.m. in Hayes Hall Room 108, UB South (Main Street) Campus.

Kniazuk thanked the groups for their attendance and participation, and adjourned the meeting.

Small Business Steering Committee Meeting No. 4 November 17, 2004

Present: Hector Titus, Vincent Agnello, Donald Butzek,
Michael Casale, James Finamore, Gina Granville,
Reggie Grogan, Andrea Lizak, Melinda Rath Sanderson,
David See

Erie-Niagara Regional Partnership (ENRP) Economic Development Chair Hector Titus welcomed the steering committee. The members introduced themselves. It was noted that Subbiah Mantharam of the UB Institute for Local Governance and Regional Growth was present to assist the group with technical questions.

ENRP Administrator Tod A. Kniazuk reviewed the process, and reaffirmed that the meeting would consist of three interviews, followed by deliberation and a recommendation to the ENRP for their consideration at the December 3 ENRP general meeting. The groups would not be making presentations, but rather would answer questions from the steering committee. Each group was allocated a maximum of one half hour.

Interview One was with Teddie Granville, Jennifer Parker, and Jason Head of Conbrio. Questions were asked about accessibility, ease of use, and working with the steering committee. Conbrio stressed that the homepage should pass the "10 second test," where within 10 seconds a user fully understands what they are looking at. Further, it should be a fast loading site so that people using lower technology computers can easily use it. They also noted that one of their strengths is the ability to create extremely distinct visuals that are unique to each site, essentially helping us brand the site. The steering committee will be involved throughout the process.

Conbrio reaffirmed that there are no hidden costs in the proposal, and that any additional work would be negotiated out (adding additional elements to the site, for instance). The script and code becomes the property of ENRP. There are no license fees for software. The site will be plug and play, with no cost to set up the site on whatever host server we choose. They will want to set up the staging area on the eventual host site if possible.

For administration of the site, a designated administrator can log in, make changes on a form, and submit them.

Interview Two was with David Becker of Graphicon Services. He detailed that he will design two different layouts and let us pick the one we like better. The site will be user friendly and would be able to be used by dial-up users. There would also be a feature that would translate the site into other languages.

In terms of hosting, the software Graphicon uses would require hosting with them (at an additional cost). Likewise, if we wanted to move the site it would require an additional cost and work contract. For administration, one machine would be equipped with the program to make changes. There is an additional cost for each additional machine. ENRP would own the data.

When asked to clear up the ambiguity in their data collection methods and time allotted for them, Becker replied that he was not counting on doing the data collection (a required element in the SFP), but that he could send out a bulk e-mail to the agencies for no additional cost.

Interview Three was with Bob Rosenberry of Web Media Services. Like the others, the site will be user friendly and will be able to be quickly accessed.

Since Web Media has a contract with Erie County, the site can be hosted on the county's servers free of charge if ENRP so desires. The site will be portable, provided it is being moved to a similar database and development platform.

Rosenberry noted that he went on to the ENRP website and looked at minutes of the previous steering committee meetings. Based on this, he wanted to stress that the interactive search will have to be designed in very specific detail, as the computer can't make a judgment call on the answers to the search questions.

Following the three interviews, the steering committee began deliberations. Kniazuk apologized for including Graphicon, as it turned out that they did not meet all three of the required elements (data collection).

Gina Granville noted that BERC recently hired Conbrio and that they have been doing good work for them. She also called their experience as a small business a plus.

Melinda Rath Sanderson called the three firms' approaches different from one another. Conbrio is very keyed-in on graphic design; Graphicon was very technology oriented, although she did like the translation feature; Web Media has a lot of clients, so we might get lost in the shuffle a bit with them.

Reggie Grogan liked that Conbrio would give us a branding look to tie in to our marketing efforts. She thought it was a plus that Web Media knows the Erie County site, but would be want to look similar to that site?

Michael Casale noted that Graphicon did the NCIDA website and were great, but also noted that they weren't very specific in their response to our SFP.

Mantharam detailed that from a tech perspective Conbrio and Web Media are comparable. Graphicon is less flexible because of their hosting requirement. Also, with Web Media hosting is free (should we choose to host on the Erie County server), whereas with the others there would be a recurring cost.

Andrea Lizak liked Conbrio's branding, saying that we do need to create an image for the site. Vincent Agnello added that we'd be one of their larger clients and so they would showcase us. Titus called Conbrio an "excellent choice."

The steering committee voted unanimously to recommend Conbrio, provided they could include data gathering and a translation feature. In the event they could not, then the committee would recommend Web Media Services.

Kniazuk had a follow-up conversation with Jennifer Fisher at Conbrio and confirmed that the aforementioned features could be added without an appreciable increase in cost. Therefore, **the Erie-Niagara Regional Partnership Small Business Steering Committee recommends that ENRP award a contract to Conbrio for design and construction of a small business assistance website.**